

## RAMGOOLAM'S NEW ATTITUDE TO SECURE INSECURITY - A REFLECTION OF DIASPORIC PREDICAMENTS IN NEIL BISSOONDATH'S '*INSECURITY*'

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### ABSTRACT

Every human being whether poor or rich needs shelter and safety because the peace of mind is achievable only when someone is secured. The security doesn't mean to have so many bodyguards or the burglar-proofing houses but it is a state of mind where everyone wants to reach. And if someone finds difficulties in reaching over there, he or she surely will feel 'insecure'. There are many faces of 'insecurity' like of money, wealth, health, growth, expansion, culture, and may be of life and the sense of insecurity becomes worst in the case of the (im) migrants. And such predicaments of insecurity in the context of Indian Diaspora are aptly depicted by Neil Bissoondath in '*Insecurity*'- one of the short stories from "*Digging up the Mountains*"

**KEYWORDS:** Confusion, Corruption, Culture, Insecurity, Migration, Past, Present, Security

### INTRODUCTION

Though Neil Bissoondath, a noted Canadian writer was born in Trinidad, he has Indian roots. "Bissoondath's great – grandparents numbered among the 144,000 indentured labourers (Girmitiyas) who came to the island of Trinidad" [Penny Van, Toorn. *Neil Bissoondath and His Works*- Canadian Author Studies Series, [p.1] from India as a part of the indentured labour system. They laboured on the rice and sugarcane fields in India and years ago migrated from India- their 'home' country to Trinidad and from there to Canada.

#### **Insecurity- A Story in Digging up the Mountains**

Bissoondath has a family history of double migration from India to Trinidad to Canada, and so it is not surprising that Bissoondath narratives often focus on the experience of (im) migrants such as of displacement, uncertainty, alienation, isolation, cultural dislocation, insecurity and adaptation. These themes dominate many of the stories in Bissoondath's *Digging Up the Mountains* (1985), a collection of 14 (FOURTEEN) short stories, which was published by Macmillan Canada, Toronto in 1985. After poor responses at initial level, Bissoondath's work began to gain exposure e.g. "Dancing" was published in Saturday Night and other two stories – "In the Kingdom of the Golden Dust" and "There are a lot of Ways to Die"- were read on the CBC radio programme named 'Anthology'. On the publication of his first work, Bissoondath had mixed feelings – on the one hand, he was very happy for converting his dream (to be a writer) into reality whereas on the other hand, "he was greatly saddened that his mother (Sati), so long a supporter of his literary efforts, did not live to see the publication of his first book [Sati Naipaul died in 1983]." [Penny Van, Toorn. *Neil Bissoondath and His Works*- Canadian Author Studies Series, Canada: ECW Press, 1997, p.4].

“Insecurity” is very short in the matter of length, but remarkable story as far as the depiction of plight of (im)migrants is concerned. It tells the story of a self-made businessman- Alistair Ramgoolam who is worried and confused about his native island’s situation spoilt by poor governance and corruption, and to secure his children from the ‘fear of future’, he starts investing in other countries for the betterment of the next generation. The reason and consequences regarding the ‘insecurity’ is really though provoking. Bissoondath’s alertness to the complexity of gender relations in the multicultural context and to the differences between women’s and men’s respective experience of migration and cultural adaptation are particularly seen in most of the stories. The very first work of author focuses with narrative urgency on themes of displacement, marginality and political victimization in the stories like “The Cage”, “In the Kingdom of the Golden Dust”, “Insecurity”, “Dancing” etc. It marks the brilliant debut of Neil Bissoondath as a major voice in Canadian fiction. Focusing on contemporary themes of cultural dislocation, revolution, and the shifting politics of the Third World, the stories resonate with Bissoondath’s compassion for people threatened by circumstances beyond their control like Ramgoolam in ‘*Insecurity*’.

The shorter stories, about half of the collection, are primarily character sketches. They are pleasant and generally well done but lack fire. The longer stories are broader in context and far more successful. It is a series of short stories which focuses on the themes like alienation, terror, homelessness and adaptation etc.

### **Insecurity of Ramgoolam**

“We are very insecure in this place (island)” [Bissoondath, Neil. “*Digging Up the Mountains*” p.68] –the very first line of the story- ‘*Insecurity*’ suggests that something really goes wrong on the island (not named as Bissoondath’s peculiarity, but mostly resembles Trinidad) and that’s why the protagonist- Alistair Ramgoolam seems very insecure in his own country. Alistair Ramgoolam, a similar self-made businessman who had witnessed the farewell of the last British Governor, is trying to escape by buying a house in Toronto through his elder son because the Black people (Africans) protest and target the Indian (im)migrants who progresses well. But Ramgoolam is unable to justify his flee because he has two different ‘views’ of the island- one admires the beauty of island because the foreigners like it’s beaches and mountains and consider it as the best place whereas the people who live on the island from their birth now face insurgency/emergency like situations since the policemen with guns are increasing and the ‘students parading Marx and Castro’ [Bissoondath, Neil. “*Digging Up the Mountains*” [p.68]. Moreover, the walls of Ramgoolam’s store have been daubed with slogans: ‘Socialism’ and ‘Black Communism.’ The sense of drift nurtures unease and ongoing tension of the island propels the trend of (im)migration, double citizenships, investing black money through illegal channels e.g. Ramgoolam invest money in his Toronto account through the company which guarantees secrecy and security of his wealth without intimating the island government.

However, Ramgoolam’s ‘views’ on the island are rejected which is revealed through his unsold book on the island. The opening of the story shows that the protagonist’s mind is wavering, even in front of the guest who is an agent from bank of Canada where he had deposited money by smuggling out. The instability on the island forced Ramgoolam to smuggle out his money to another country where his son had already settled for education. No doubt he had good fortune in business on the island but the way he is earning money is pinching him to discover a new place for the rest of his life and the betterment of the next generation in the shape of his son-Vijay who is fond of latest cars and luxurious life and never comes across with harshness of life. He is really worried about the future of the island because the military action against the protestor leads the island to the ‘poverty’ and he does not want to be poor again as “He has no desire to return

to the moneyless nobility of his childhood: pride is one thing, stupidity quite another, Alistair Ramgoolam was acutely aware of the difference.” [Bissoondath, Neil. *“Digging Up the Mountains”* p. 71]

### **Problem of Corruption Confusion**

Ramgoolam's journey of success on the island is full of hardships and at the fringe of events of life, he has some sort of self-proclaimed authority and comprehending capacities over the past. But the present, with its confusion and corruption, eludes him. From the description of the island it is clear that the island is politically turmoil and the presence of number of policemen with guns threatens the people. No doubt the reason for such disorder is corruption along with poor governance. For instance, Ramgoolam becomes an exporter from the importer only with his tactics to handle the officers of the customs. But the rocket growth of Indian immigrants pinches the 'Blacks' who feel betrayed. Moreover, the poor ability to handle the independence results into the attacks on the Indians by 'Blacks' (Africans) who feel subversion and treason after the 'failed experiment of independence. The Indians who have progressed in the matter of health and wealth are being targeted.

From the routine of Ramgoolam, we can easily perceive the roots of Indian tradition in his family which were uprooted by his forefathers to settle in the new island. The way in which he prays to the God, we remember the touch of cultural aspects of Ramgoolam to respect his own traditions. And he wishes to hand over the same respect to the tradition and culture to his next generation- children but having doubt of proper execution because his sons are far away from their 'originality'. Here in the story *'Insecurity'* the pattern is like that of the title story-*'Digging Up the Mountains'*: decent people who have worked hard are threatened by the smoldering volcano of colonial resentment and disorder, again the wrong people are in charge, the independence will have failed and one tyranny, usually the British variety, will be replaced by the Caribbean kind of autocracy.

### **Profit or Loss**

“The more insecure he saw his island becoming, the more secure he himself felt”[Bissoondath, Neil. *“Digging Up the Mountains”* [p.72]. He has almost invested fifty thousand dollars in the secret account in Canada. No doubt Ramgoolam is a successful businessman but he cannot understand the value of 'time' because he has taken much time in taking the decision to invest in the 'house' in Toronto rather than depositing money in the bank of Canada only for the profit and security. Ramgoolam fails to understand the real estate business in Toronto which is in high demand and readies to buy a house only after his son convinced him. Ramgoolam has conviction that 'time is money' and 'buy only when you can pay' [Bissoondath, Neil. *“Digging Up the Mountains”* p.75] which suggests his acute sense of businessman but in reality he is at the loss due to delaying the decision to procure and also to drop the idea of investing in the 'house'. His dilemma is due to his conscious misery since he doesn't want to pay for the 'cheap' real estate agent. Even he is not ready to take any risk to earn profit and so he never communicates directly to his son through phone, but sends letter thought unknown friend's friend who is about to go abroad- Canada. The ongoing drive of (im) migration is also a result of 'insecurity' of the island.

However, his son in Toronto enjoys the life without any tension or 'fear of future' as he chooses to go for 'ballet' rather than collecting the letter from the agent sent by his father-Ramgoolam who leaves every moment of enjoyment for the sake of saving the future of next generation future-his children. The new attitude to secure 'insecurity' of the island takes Ramgoolam's happiness and confuses him between 'present' and 'future'. “The confusion had been prepared for, and

all that was left was enjoyment that squeezed out of the island between now and then” [Bissoondath, Neil. “*Digging Up the Mountains*” [p.72]. From the conversation about ‘ballet’, Ramgoolam realizes that his son has gone far away from him means the second generation of (im) migrants have no bonding or attachment to their originality and culture. Ramgoolam’s real insecurity is not of island but of his next generation who is unaware of the roots/originality and now trying to plant the new ‘roots’ in the new country! Also Ramgoolam feels insecurity because his children are not really worried about their parents who have to suffer from the ‘loneliness’: “. he suddenly understood how far his son had gone” [Bissoondath, Neil. “*Digging Up the Mountains*” [p.77]

## CONCLUSIONS

The element of insecurity is common to all developing countries because of political instability which seems mostly in so many stories in Bissoondath’s “*Digging Up the Mountains*” as prominent theme and the subsequent affect on the citizens and their decisions to shift from their ‘home’ to another countries. The same stance was felt by the Ramgoolam on his island. Apparently it seems that it causes only after riots and demonstration but gradually it brings to fore that the causes are not always so responsible for such predicaments. It is a clear case of displacement of the migrants and their second generation who is totally disconnected from the ‘roots’- original tradition and culture. And the migrants are helpless for not transferring the truth regarding poverty, original culture and tradition from where their fore-fathers had reached to that place. No knowledge and respect for original culture, tradition and ‘roots’ by the second generation drags the people like Ramgoolam to feel insecure not only from outside, but also from ‘inside’ and always think about how to secure such ‘insecurity’.

“He (Ramgoolam) now saw himself as being left behind, caught between the shades of his father and, unexpectedly, of his son. And he knew that his insecurity, until then always in the land around him, in the details of life daily lived, was now within him” [Bissoondath, Neil. “*Digging Up the Mountains*”p.77]

That is why he starts his daily life again on the island because the outside insecurity is less dangerous than inside one.

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